

Testimony by Marilyn S Pet, Esq., 235 East River Drive, #1601 East Hartford, CT

Our East Hartford Schools are facing a crisis in survival. I hope there will be a legislative solution to some of our problem. I am asking that you amend Senate Bill 473 to include a 5% cap on Magnet School Tuition

I am an attorney who has spent a good part of my professional life involved with children. I have represented abused and neglected children who were involved with DCF. I have been President of the Regional Advisory Council, a group created to link the legislature with DCF (then DCYS). I sit on the East Hartford School Readiness Council and ChildPlan- both groups involved with East Hartford Youth. I have been a member of the East Hartford Board of Education for a little over two years. I have always been interested in education in that I feel it is a means for improving the lives of the ones who are educated as well as providing society in general with good citizens who have learned how to take care of themselves. I have seen how the results of child neglect - physical, emotional and educational- early in life impact later life. I know professionals who worked for DCF and later in their career for the Bureau of Prisons who met the same children- now turned adults and in jail.

Magnet schools, though very effective at one level have created competition with the local schools. The end result is that state government encourages robbing Peter to pay Paul. The approach that East Hartford has taken is to strive to make our local schools special – more special than the magnets with their bright shiny newness and up to the minute equipment.

East Hartford has been successful in innovating programs that meet the requirements of future employers and educational institutions and ---- attracting East Hartford children. As an example - at the O'Brien Elementary School a STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) curriculum has been instituted in grades 4-6 with plans to offer the program in K-3, the middle school and the high school. The kids are excited about what they are learning and they have encouraged their parents to get involved with the school. Test scores at O'Brien have been climbing out of the cellar. The teachers have taken on the common core curriculum and teacher evaluation with some fear and trepidation, but are working hard to meet the proposed goals because of their belief in their leaders and administrators. The East Hartford Board of Education has been named a Best Work Place for three years in a row; our Superintendant been named one of the Forty under Forty to be proud of; our High School Principal was just selected as Principal of the Year for the State of Connecticut. I might add that all this and more has been done even when East Hartford spends less on each child for education than 159 other towns in the state. What we do have is enthusiastic and creative thinkers in positions to bring about change. We will not be able to continue this momentum with five million dollar shortfalls. I believe we are in danger of losing the gains we have made and the wonderful staff we have employed to bring about these changes because we cannot afford to keep operating with fewer dollars.

Every year more and more money is drained from our budget from magnet school tuitions. Our town is strapped for funds and allocations to the Board of Education have been steadily decreasing while salaries and health care costs have been going steadily upward. It will be very difficult to keep the process moving forward while the funds keep going in the opposite direction. I hope that you will consider relieving the towns of some of the burden imposed on us from the current funding of magnet schools. Punishing the sincere and effective efforts of Connecticut towns with diminishing funding makes no fiscal or political sense.